FURNISHED ROOMS

House at Elkton
by the Bridge

Flora and Mary Wells – Sixty years later

At Home in Elkton Oregon

From "A Simple Sketch of the Life of Mrs. Anna Elizabeth Mandler Wells"

Transcribed by Mary T. Wells

Entry 4 of 4

Oh, but the hardships were yet to come. The virgin soil must be broken up with slow moving oxen, wheat grown for winter flour and hauled to Oregon city by the same slow oxen to be ground into flour, taking two weeks or fourteen days to make the round trip having first thrashed the grain with a flail and winnowed in a pan. In lieu of flour, boiled wheat was resorted to, many meals were made on boiled wheat alone. But they were not discouraged—there was a greater Oregon ahead. More settlers were coming every year. Some of California's gold was being scattered, gold croppings were being found in Oregon. Scottsburg was rapidly growing as a seaport town where supplies could be gotten by a two days travel with horses. But alas for Scottsburg and also for the hopes of the settlers, alas, alas!

In the last days of November 1861 there came a tremendous downpour of rain, on Dec. 1st, 1861 the Umpqua river had risen until its banks were full to overflowing and still it rained and on the 8th day of Dec. 1861 the banks did overflow and the whole country round about was flooded with water and Scottsburg was washed out to sea. The people fleeing to the hills for safety. The harbor was completely destroyed as well as the city. But that was not all, the end—was not yet. On the Newyears day 1862 it began to snow and it snowed for days and days and was followed by a long siege of hard freezing weather 'the snow laid on and the people suffered with cold and hunger, The stock suffered and died and starved until there was almost nothing left in the country. It was a terrible time known ever after as the hard winter of 61 and-2 (61 and 62), and so Scottsburg with all its fair promise faded into history which meant more than can be told to the early settlers of the Umpqua Valley. But they still held to their faith in the young state; they lived and struggled and hoped for better days. June 4th,1852 another baby girl came to this house. The first born on this new claim, and the first white girl babe born at this point on the Umpqua and as the years rolled on six more children were added to the home circle making a total of eleven children born by this mother. One in 1855 was born while the family with other families were under guard in a fort when the Rogue River Indians were hostile and on the rampage and the Umpquas threatened to join them, It

was a busy life with roads to build and the struggle for a livelihood. There was no time to spare, The country must be developed, advances made, schools established, which thought was the mothers greatest worry—the lack of educational facilities and advantages for the children. She would walk the floor back and forth and twist the corner of her apron (as was her custom in deep thought) and study, ponder and ponder how it could be done. There was no mail service, no books, magazines or newspapers, nothing but her dear old German bible she had brought across the briny deep and the father's bible that had been brought with him from the State of Vermont in 1828. Well, in time, they got hold of one copy of Webster's spelling book and Poor Richard's Almanac and with these she started school in the house. Other children came and about 1856 they were instrumental in building a log school house on Uncle Asaph Wells place as a central location and hired a teacher whose name was W. H. Spencer. As soon as more books were secured there was more school. One winter school was held in their own home, the neighbors children joining the class. After the log school house was built the Methodist circuit riders would come in perhaps once a year. That was a great event in the lives of the youngsters. The father yoked his oxen, hitched to the sled and would take the whole family to church and would bring the minister back home in the sled, the children prattling along on foot free as the birds. The yellow legged dominique hen had been slain. There were fried doughnuts, clean faces and possibly a new calico frock for some of the older girls anyway. Well, this preacher liked it too, sometimes stayed for weeks, hold night service, have prayers at home and a general good time. In this home the latch string was always on the outside to preachers of any and all denominations. The Bible had the first and best place in the house, was loved and cherished, especially by the mother, and she never tired of reading its pages. There could be no better portrayal of her life and character than that given in the 51st chapter of Proverbs, beginning at the tenth verse, the date of her birth. She was taught as she taught her children, that was the birth chapter, a birth for each child born on any day of any month, but to her these 21 (twenty-one) verses are applicable, except the 22nd. Her dress was never of silk or satin. She worked with flax from the planting to the weaving of fine linen. She has knitted hundreds of pairs of socks. She has carded, spun, woven and knit the wool. The socks she sold to miners and freighters on the road before the days of automobiles and aeroplanes, telephones and radios were ever dreamed

Forty-one years this worthy couple struggled on togather on the old donation claim that both their hearts loved so well. Their family grown to men and womanhood, educated to the very best of their ability, they felt their life work was finished and retired from active service.

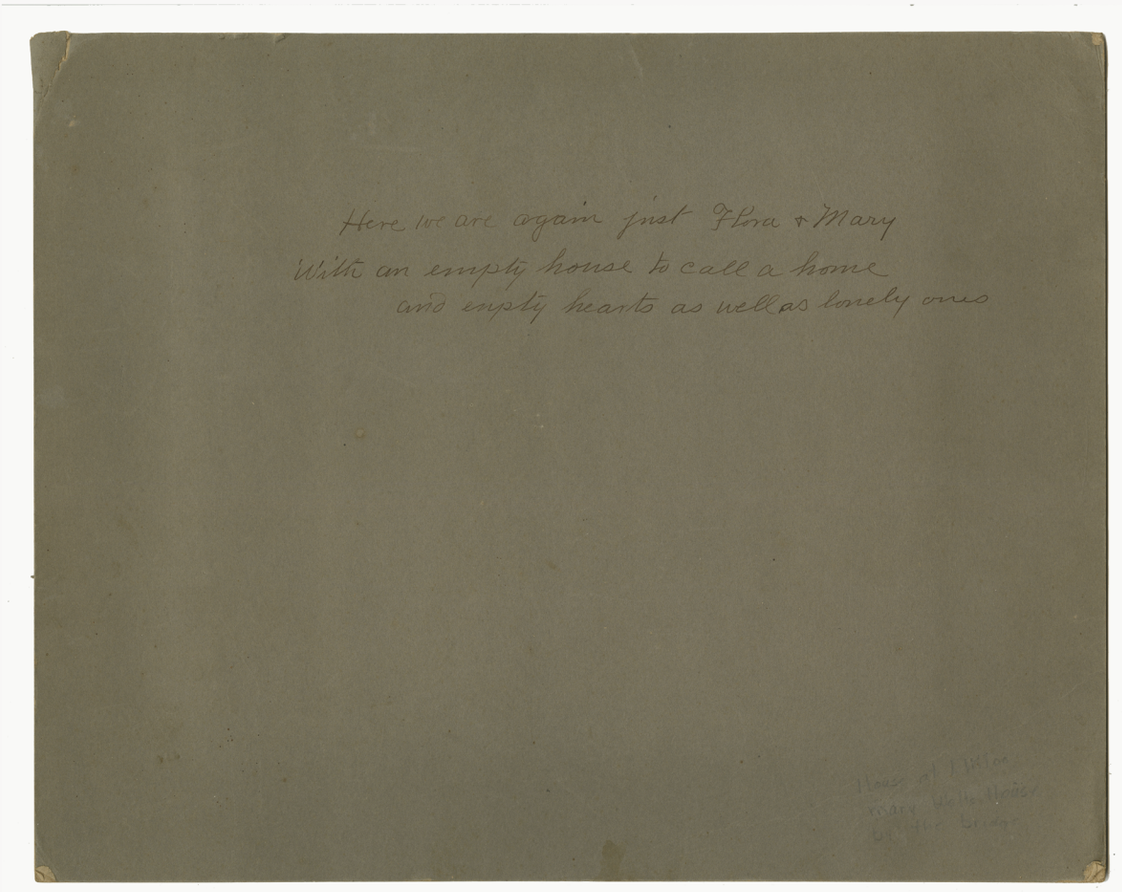
Mr. Wells was called higer June 17,1892. A busy useful life in the early activities of the Oregon Country and of Douglas County was ended.

He had served one term as county commissioner,as well as many other places of service for the county.

With a breaking heart in March 1899, Mrs. Wells left the dear old home and moved with her two youngest living daughters to the town of Elkton to make her last stand. She could not be induced to go farther than that from the farm that had become so near a part of herself by the struggles and associations, the joys and sorrows she had gone through with her family,and to leave the State of Oregon was not to be mentioned at all. So her new home was built near the confluence of Elk Creek and the Umpqua river and not far from the point from which she first beheld that river before the advent of the white man,save only the Hudson Bay Co.,on the opposite shore. There in that humble home her blameless life ended Sept. 25th,1904. She had "fought the goodk fight of faith" and "finished her course".

The long, long trail was ended that had begun so long ago in that far away land across the seas. Ended in the little town of Elkton,Oregon on the place where now stands the Oregon State Highway Bridge spanning Elk Creek,the stream she forded on horseback with her child in her arms in her attempt tp reach this neck of the woods. Eighty years have come and gone since then and many changes have come and gone with the years, but perhaps no greater change has come than the change that has come to the"trail" of 1851. Thus it might be said that the "subject of this sketch""Anna Elizabeth Wells" blazed the trail and paved the way for the Oregon State Highway to reach the Coast 80 years ago!

Facts taken from Family history



House at Elkton
by the Bridge

Flora and Mary Wells – Sixty years later c 1924

The House at Elkton
Mary and Flora Wells c 1924 – Sixty years later

Reflections
Jeffrey Hunt
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This photo shows Mary T. Wells and Flora Wells standing outside their home in Elkton, Oregon—a modest boarding house marked by the faint but legible sign *FURNISHED ROOMS*. The image was taken sometime before 1925, the year Flora passed away. Mary would live on until 1948, but the tone of the handwritten note on the back suggests a period of quiet hardship and change:

> *Here we are again just Flora + Mary*
> *With an empty house to call a home*
> *and empty hearts as well as lonely ones*

Below the verse, a simple note appears—likely added later by a family member:

> *House at Elkton*
> *Mary Wells House*
> *by the bridge*

Neither sister had children. When the house was eventually closed, its contents—photos, papers, heirlooms—were passed down to relatives and a few to the Douglas County Museum. That is how this image, and many others, came into my hands.

Mary T. Wells was more than just the surviving sister in this photograph. She was the one who preserved our stories—the family chronicler who wrote distant relatives, gathered records, and composed the memoir that anchors so much of our sense of place and belonging. Among the stories she saved was that of her mother's immigration from Prussia in 1839, a young girl crossing oceans to start a new life.

Mary had grown up in this house, the youngest daughter in one of Elkton's earliest homesteading families. She watched the town rise around her, saw her family fill the rooms, and then slowly vanish. By the time this photo was taken, the house was no longer just a place to live, but a final outpost of memory, dignity, and endurance.

It is hard to look at this image without feeling the gravity of that moment—a threshold between eras, held together by two aging sisters, doing what they could to remain.

Mary T Wells c 1879
Around sixteen years of age